Vacation and Cake

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Vacation and Cake

by Azure_K_Mello

Summary

Will begins his vacation after not having a day off in ages. Abigail deals with news. Will evaluates his life. Hannibal plays dress up. There's cake.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

He woke up slowly and didn't panic when he realized there was someone in his bed because he remembered the night before. He remembered a nice dinner, and great sex and cuddling that didn't leave him scared and freaked out. Hannibal had his arm draped over Will's abdomen and Will didn't feel the need push him off. He shut his eyes and thought about the breathing exercise Mort had told him to do in the morning. He listened to the birds outside, his stomach was making noises even though he wasn't hungry. He inhaled the scent of sex and warmth and his fabric softener. He'd already messed up Mort's exercise. He was supposed keep his eyes shut if he woke up and wasn't in pain or danger but he'd been a little surprised by the flesh touching his. He tried to reclaim his sleepy mind.

He was safe, in his own bed. Yesterday was over, for better or worse it was a brand new day. Today was like new paint on an old wall. All the old smudged were still there but they weren't on the surface. He could paint it whatever color he liked. He could paint it a nice growing green. It was his wall, his day, and it could be filled however he liked. The only day he could live was his own and the best thing for him was to fill it with nice activities. His life should be filled with monographs, teaching, his few friends, his many dogs, the boat.

"What are you doing?" asked a soft voice as Hannibal stroked his hand over Will's abdomen.

"Mentally preparing myself for the day."

"One of Mort's exercises?" Will nodded. "Is it working?"

"I don't think I'm supposed to be talking. But I don't think Mort expected me to have anyone in my bed." He was surprised but not upset when lips met his. He smiled into the kiss. He blinked slowly and said, "I'm also not supposed to open my eyes."

Hannibal smiled at him, "I'm going to go make us some coffee, take your time and I'll let the dogs out."

Will started to sit up and said, "It doesn't matter. I don't really need to be mentally prepared for a nice Saturday."

"No," Hannibal put his hands on Will's shoulders and gently pushed him onto his back. "It's better that you learn the breathing exercises on days when you aren't reliant on them. Come a busy and brutal Wednesday, you'll be able to fall into it easily." He kissed him again, "Go back to breathing." He climbed out of bed and said, "Take your time."

Will sighed and shut his eyes. He went back to imagining his blank wall, green and clean. He pictured what he planned to do for the day: walk the dogs, do a little laundry, visit Abigail, eat cake, maybe teach Hannibal how to tie a fly. It would be nice. Then he considered what to do in the event that Jack turned up. He would just say no. And he would say it again and again. What would he do if one of his dogs stepped on something sharp? He would keep calm and take the dog to the vet. He went over all the possible bad things that could happen and came up with a plan for each problem. When he felt ready he breathed out slowly and opened his eyes as he sat up. Harry was on the floor, watching him silently and Will smiled.

“Hi, boy, why aren’t you outside?” He stood and pulled on clean underwear and his robe. Harry made a whining noise and Will picked him up, “S’okay, what’s wrong?” But the minute Harry was in his arms the dog perked up and licked Will’s neck, “You’re just put out because you didn’t get to sleep in the bed, aren’t you?” he stroked the little dog and carried him to the kitchen. "Harry's sulking,” he told Hannibal.

Hannibal smiled and handed him a cup of coffee, “How was your breathing?”

“Good, I think it’ll help me plan for bad days.” He kissed Hannibal’s cheek and took a sip of his coffee before putting Harry down. “Go play outside,” Will ordered as he opened the door and pointed and Harry trotted out obediently. Will shut the door behind him and said, “So what’s your plan for the day?”

“Cake with Abigail. Other than that it’s wholly up to you. I’m only going to go home tonight if you want me too.”

“A walk with me and the dogs to start?”

“Sounds good,” Hannibal nodded. “Do you want to warm up the salad?”

“You can if you like; I never do. Reheated eggs always taste weird to me.” Looking out the window he saw the dogs’ bowl were outside and full. “Thanks for taking care of the boys.”

“They’re good dogs,” Hannibal shrugged.

Will got the salad from the fridge and said, “Do you want this warmed up?”

“As I’ve said before, food should be served as the chef prefers.”

Will laughed as he got wooden spoons to toss the salad, remixing the parts that had settled at the bottom of the bowl, and said, “I don’t know if anyone would call me a chef.”

“I’ll call you whatever you wish if you keep handing me delicious southern food,” Hannibal said with a smile as he took a sip of his coffee. Will served the salad and brought the bowls to the table. Hannibal brought the coffee press as they sat down. And when Hannibal took his first bite of the salad he said, “This is better the second day.”

“It might be,” agreed Will. He ate happily and after a little silence said, “I liked waking up with you in my bed.”

“I liked waking up in your bed,” Hannibal responded.

“I can’t really leave the dogs for the night. They don’t do well.”

Hannibal nodded, “I know. I like your bed. I like your shower’s water pressure. You like your space. If you don’t mind me being in your space then I will happily share it.”

“I like you being in my space.”

Hannibal smiled happily over his potato salad. “Good. Now, I do have a rather prickly question for you. Feel free to say no. I assume that you have things to do today in preparation for your father’s arrival.”

“I need to vacuum upstairs and do a ton of laundry. How is that a prickly question?”

“I transcribe all my patient notes to keep a digital record. How would you feel it I told you that my iPad was in my car?”

Will smiled, “That you should bring it inside and work while I clean.”

“It won’t upset you to have electronics in your haven?”

“Are you going to make me watch cat videos on YouTube?” asked Will.

“No.”

“Then I’m totally fine with it. If I don’t have to watch it I’m fine, even if it makes noise, I just pretend it’s a radio.”

“I’m just going to be transcribing.”

“You go ahead and transcribe while I do laundry. I don’t have internet.”

“I have quite a lot of transcribing to do and do not require the internet for any of it,” said Hannibal.

“I played down the amount of housework I have so that you wouldn’t get bored and leave. I was planning on putting it off.”

Hannibal laughed, “Good, don’t put it off I’ll work until you’re done.”

Will smiled, “Okay.” It seemed like it was so domestic. Sitting and eating in his underwear and robe with the man was. Hannibal was in a robe that wasn’t Will’s Dad’s. Hannibal was comfortable and that made it comfortable. Will had never liked the morning after, never. The person had invariably seen him have a slight panic attack the night before and then they were just in his space or he was in theirs, itching to get out. But for the last two morning’s he’d luxuriated in the presence of another person. A person he hadn’t frozen with the night before. He was still mostly naked and, for once, that was okay in his book. He took his pills with his coffee and his head didn’t hurt at all.

Once they were done with breakfast Hannibal said, “Can I share your shower?”

Will nodded but said, “I might be bad at that.”

“Why do you think that?” asked Hannibal.

Will shrugged, “I’m really bad at anything to do with sex.”

“Not that I’ve seen,” said Hannibal.

“Usually I’m really bad.” The sun through the window warmed Will’s skin and he felt himself blush. They finished breakfast and Winston whined at the door as Will stood to clean up the dishes. He let them in. They went straight to their beds. Will smiled at them and said, “They’re not going to like it that their beds are going through the washing machine.”

“How frequently do you wash them?”

“Every two weeks,” said Will.

“That explains why the house doesn’t smell overly doggish,” said Hannibal. Hannibal stood and came to him and kissed him slowly. “You smell fantastic. Come shower with me.”

Will drew him in for another kiss and then nodded, “Okay.”

In the bathroom Hannibal carefully removed the dressing from his forehead and they brushed their teeth while waiting for the water to warm up. Hannibal started to shave as Will stepped into the shower and grabbed his electric razor. He ran it over his face, getting his scruff to the right length. Hannibal stepped in as Will rinsed his razor off. Hannibal smiled, “So, that scruffy look takes an effort?”

“I like my beard.”

Hannibal kissed him slowly and said, “I like you.”

Will kissed him again before grabbing the shampoo. They washed each other, making out under the spray and Will didn’t want to pull away even once. He was happy, genuinely happy. He relaxed against the other man as Hannibal started to massage his ass. The steam filled the room and it was easy to believe they were the only two people in a world of mist. There was no before or after just this. It was what Mort had been urging him to do. Plan ahead but live now. He laughed into Hannibal’s mouth.

“What?” asked the other man softly.

“Mort told me to live more in the moment.”

“So glad I can help your psychological health as a lover if not a doctor.”

“Oh, you’re definitely helping,” Will agreed. He reached past Hannibal to turn off the water and said, "Let's get the dogs some exercise before they forget they’re the best trained dogs in the world and destroy my house.”

Hannibal laughed and kissed his neck, “This is a wonderful morning.”

“Yeah,” agreed Will as he pushed the curtain back and reached for the towels. They dried themselves and Will dabbed The Scent of Joy on his neck’s pulse point. Hannibal applied his own. Hannibal had laid out toiletries before Will had gotten up. He redressed his head wound and as he reached for a moisturizer Will had to bite back a laugh and kissed his cheek. “I’m going to get dressed.”

He hung his towel up and walked through to his bedroom naked. The dogs looked up at the sound of the door opening but settled back down when they saw it was only naked him. This was neither interesting nor new, frequently the same thing for the dogs. He dressed comfortably for a long walk. And as he was pulling on socks Hannibal came in, also naked but with perfect hair, and Will watched him as he got dressed, enjoying the view. The sun was still shinning nicely through the window, making the bed sheets warm to the touch. Some other time he would like to spend the day in bed with Hannibal. He wanted to push himself, to see what could be fun instead of terrifying with someone he actually trusted. He stood from where he was sitting and said, “I’m going to make a thermos of coffee for us.”

In the kitchen, the dogs watched him as he put the water on to boil and he put on his walking boots. They knew the routine. On weekends he would wake up slowly, eat breakfast, shower, make coffee and then the fields were theirs to share. He couldn’t remember the last Saturday when he’d done this. He wasn’t the only one to suffer because of his time with Jack. The boys had been missing out on lovely long walks. Calvin climbed his leg as always to get a good look at the grinder in action as the water came to the boil. He stroked Calvin between the ears. “I have best dogs on Earth,” he said softly. He made the coffee with Calvin still standing on his leg.

Hannibal came in and said, “He’s very good at that. He perches so elegantly.”

Will smiled as he poured the coffee into the thermos. Hannibal shrugged into a soft looking pale leather jacket and in no time at all they were out the door, holding hands while the dogs moved around them. They walked over the fields. It was a pretty morning and Will felt good in his own skin. The dogs brought them toys they’d left out in the field and good sticks for them to throw. It was pleasant not to have to make an effort with someone.

They passed the thermos back and forth. “The plot next to mine is for sale. It belongs to the FBI. I’ve been thinking about it. It’s twenty-two acres for thirty-five grand… do you think that’s crazy?”

“I think land in Virginia is very cheap.”

“There’s no house on it but it has some really nice woods… crazy right?”

“You would have over sixty acres. That doesn’t seem crazy. That seems nice.”

“My dad is always talking about moving up here. If I quit working at Quantico I could build him a house.”

Hannibal laughed, “That seems a little crazy.”

“Well, I could help men build him a house.”

“You could,” Hannibal agreed.

“Crazy?” asked Will.

“Not at all,” Hannibal shook his head. “I like the part where you considered quitting.”

Will laughed, “Until then it’s just a nice amount of land. I like owning space. I’d like one hundred acres, just so I could own it.”

“Good for you. If you can afford it you should get it. Can you afford it?”

“I have nine monographs that are on the syllabus of every forensics course around the world and every crime lab worth its salt has them on the shelves. I get four bucks every time someone buys one. I get a huge surge every time a school semester starts. And I’m teaching master classes at Quantico. Do you know how much money and prestige comes with the title of ‘Professor’ comes with when you’re teaching the top level students of the FBI academy? It’s possible I make more money than you.”

“You should see if the FBI can give you a discount.”

“No one has bid on it. I can maybe get them to go down a bit.”

“It doesn’t hurt to ask,” Hannibal shrugged. Winston brought him a ball that Hannibal obligingly threw for him. “Such a nice day.”

Will smiled at him. They played with the dogs and walked until all the coffee was gone and the dogs were sedately walking with them, energy finally spent. They went back to the house and before the dogs could get settled Will grabbed all the beds and said, “I’m going to go beat the fur off these. Make yourself comfortable.”

Hannibal smiled as he sat down on the couch, turning on his iPad and pulling out files. “Do your work and I’ll do mine.” Will brought the beds outside and plugged his vacuum in on his porch. He vacuumed them until they looked spotless. He pulled the covers off the beds and left the cushions outside to air and brought the covers back inside and dumped them into the washing machines with his dog-safe detergent. He went back out and spritzed the cushions with an odor-neutralizing spray.

Hannibal was relaxing, had claimed the couch and most of the coffee table as his own, files spread out. Will saw that Hannibal had gotten himself a glass of lemonade ice tea and looked comfortable. Will drank in the sight, enjoying seeing the other man so comfortable in Will’s space. Will brought the dogs outside and gave them all bathes. He blow-dried them on the porch and said, “You need to stay clean for a while, guys, no rolling for a while.” He kissed them each on their now-clean heads. Back inside he scrubbed the kitchen and the dogs’ clean paws skittered over the polished floor.

Upstairs, Will changed the bed for fresh sheets, put clean towels on the chair in the corner and hung his dad’s laundered dressing gown in the closet. He dusted and vacuumed and then cleaned the bathroom. The dogs followed him around watching with interest. He so rarely went upstairs that the dogs seemed to find it fascinating. He was done and went back downstairs where he put the dog bed covers into the drier with two clean tennis balls. Once that was done he gathered up all the laundry and brought it through. He had at least four loads, there’d been no time with the hours he’d been keeping to do any laundry. He was down to his last three pairs of clean boxers. “Do you want me to put your underwear through or are your socks dry-clean only?” Will joked.

Hannibal laughed, “That would be great. Thank you.”

Will loaded up the machine with laundry and then vacuumed his bedroom and the living room. Harry had hopped up onto the couch. “Is he bothering you?” he asked, unsure of how Hannibal felt.

“He’s a very small dog, Will, if he bothered me it would be the easiest thing in the world to get him off the couch.” He stroked Harry’s head as he leaned over to put one file on the table and pick up another. Harry made a little happy whining noise and snuggled closer to him.

Will sat down on the floor in front of the engine. He got out his tools and Hannibal said, “Taking a break?”

“No, I just have laundry, piles and piles of laundry.”

Hannibal put his iPad aside. “Will you teach me how to properly tie a fly?”

Will smiled, “Yes, if you like.”

He stood and brought his fly tying materials to the table. And, over the next couple of hours, he taught Hannibal how to tie several kinds of flies. The dogs took his seat on the floor as permission to curl up next to and on top of him. He got up to do the laundry, switching things between the machines. He remade the dogs’ beds and some instantly reclaimed their spots. Hannibal made a couple of pretty ones and Will felt himself smiling. Hannibal went back to transcribing his notes as Will got the ironing board to do all his work shirts. After a couple more hours Hannibal rested his iPad on the table. He watched Will folding and said, “That’s your last load, is it not?”

“Yes, it is,” agreed Will.

“Good, I’ll make us lunch.”

“You’re not an I-eat-when-I-remember person, are you?” asked Will with a smile.

“No, besides, you need feeding up.”

“I’ve been remembering to eat a lot more frequently, recently. Since the diagnosis and the pills. Sometimes, I feel like I’m the only person in my brain. It’s like I immerged from a dense fog filled with strangers to find myself alone in a familiar place. I know who this man I am is because it’s just me. It’s amazing after being so sick.”

Hannibal studied him and said, “I’m so sorry I put you through that, Will. I never should have brought you to Dr. Sutcliffe.”

“It’s over now, my depth perception is almost totally better. I haven’t had a hallucination for a while. I’ll be fine. Do you want help?”

“No, you keep folding, I’m only making sandwiches.”

“Do you eat sandwiches?” Will asked jokingly.

Hannibal shot him a smile over his shoulder as he went to the fridge. “Sometimes I like to blend in with the normal people.”

“I only have store-bought, pre-sliced, store-brand bread,” Will warned him.

There was a long pause and Hannibal finally said, “I’m making us salad.”

Will laughed and said, “Whatever you like.” He finished with his laundry as Calvin started to whine at the door. “Y’wanna go out, boy?” He walked over and the minute he went to the door the others gathered. “No rolling: stay clean. Good boys.” He shut the door behind them and brought the piles of laundry into his room to put away.

The rest of the day was like that, easy and comfortable. And at two Hannibal said, “Should we go see Abigail?”

“Sure,” Will agreed and he said to the dogs, “you boys be good.” He and Hannibal gathered what they needed, and soon were out the door.

Hannibal drove and they listened to his radio, playing soft classical music and Will enjoyed watching the scenery. Spring was finally on the air, buds were starting to emerge on the trees. Will wanted to put the rough winter behind him. It was the winter of awkward meetings, killing a man and encephalitis. The sooner the season changed the better. The only good things that had happened were finding Winston, saving Abigail and getting to know Hannibal. And he would trade his relationship with Abigail if, in its place, she had a relationship with a father who didn’t kill girls with her face.

"Interacting with Abigail is hard for me,” he admitted softly.

“You always seem to handle it well,” Hannibal observed, “better than most of your interactions.”

“I feel, when I am with her, like we’re dancing to a songs that I don’t know the steps to and that keep changing anyway. I orphaned her and saved her life. I’m one of her *de facto* guardians because I killed her dad. I try to act as her protector because I shot her protector.”

“After he killed her mother and was attempting to kill her.”

“I wasn’t there to protect her from Nicholas Boyle.”

“She protected herself from Nicholas Boyle and I protected her from the fallout.”

“Do you think, if Jack ever found out it would actually hold up in court?” asked Will, still worried about the house of cards the three of them were building together.

“He broke into the house, knocked Alana Bloom unconscious and slammed Abigail against a wall all the while screaming that he wasn’t going to hurt her. The terror she felt in that moment put her into a base mode. She was holding the knife and she defended herself. If you take away her famous name, you are left with a traumatized girl, in the place where her trauma was born, being assaulted by a strange man who had already stalked and threatened her. No, that would not stand up in court. But, add in her name?... Juries are made up of

normal people, with emotions, with prejudices. I think we have to hope that Jack doesn't try to pin it on her just to see if it will stick."

"She's hiding something, Hannibal."

"She is," agreed Hannibal. "But she's a nice girl. Whatever it is, we will know in the end. And if it's bad we will deal with it."

"Yeah," agreed Will. They pulled into the mental hospital parking lot. "We should just focus on getting her through this."

Hannibal nodded, "I agree." He got the cake carrier from the back seat as Will got the thermoses and blanket.

Inside they signed in at the desk and were told that Abigail was in the garden. They headed and it was a beautiful day, light coat weather. She was wearing a cardigan and jeans on a bench with her legs tucked up under herself, reading a book. She looked up and smiled at them at the noise of the door opening. As they walked over she said, "I thought you were Freddie Lounds. She's an hour late."

Will felt his heart sink, not having thought of how it would impact Abigail. He'd never been good with grief. When he'd been a cop and people had been killed in the line it had seemed mandatory to grieve and he hadn't wanted to, hadn't cared about the person, cops were frequently bullies by nature and Will had had few friends at the Department. He'd had to learn to fake the grief.

And grieving families were worse. Their grief was so raw and loud, it painted the walls with sadness and scented the air with despair. Better to focus on evidence. *"How's the cat?"*

He took a deep breath and said, "Abigail, how close are you and Freddie?"

She thought about it and finally said, "She's rude about you, Will. I've told her not to be but she still makes snide little comments. And she's pushy, always prying… I don't trust her."

Will nodded and said, "I'm sorry to tell you this, Abigail, but she's been murdered."

Her eyes widened and Will said nothing, letting her process it for a moment. "Am I suspect?" asked Abigail.

"No, why would you be?" asked Will.

"I know her, and Special Agent Crawford still thinks I killed Marissa. He think I helped my dad."

Will nodded slowly but said, "He has a suspect in custody. There was evidence." Then he added, because he thought maybe it was the right thing to say, "I'm sorry."

"I didn't really like her." She looked away. "You shouldn't say things like that about the dead but it's true."

“I had to fight not to gloat,” Will admitted.

She gave him a small smile and then looked to Hannibal. “What happened to your head?”

“A patient threw things at me,” Hannibal replied. “I’m fine; he’s fine.” Then he gave her a slight smile. “We brought cake to celebrate the fact that Will has a little time off he said he’s been working such long hours he hasn’t gotten to see you. Perhaps a celebration is tawdry in the face of the news we just gave you.”

She shrugged, “I feel badly because I don’t feel badly. Now I’m just worried about the book.”

Hannibal spread out the blanket and sat down. He patted the blanket and said, “Come sit down, Abigail. We can talk about your book.”

As she sat, he took off the lid of the cake carrier and she said, “That’s a very pretty cake.”

“I’m glad you like it. I hope it’s as delicious as it looks.” He had put a cake knife and Will’s small camping plates into a bag and he started to cut slices.

As Hannibal cut the cake Will said, “Abigail, would you like coffee or ice tea lemonade?”

“Is ice tea lemonade like half and half?” she asked.

“Sort of, but instead of mixing lemonade and ice tea you make the lemonade in the ice tea, instead of with water. It’s stronger and sweeter than half and half.”

She smiled and said, “I’ll take that.”

Will poured her a glass and handed it over as he said, “Do you want to write a book?”

She thought about it and said, “I wanted to go to college. My dad killed girls at all the colleges I wanted to go to. I need money, Will, the wrongful death suits haven’t begun but they’re going to win and that will take everything. Once I would have turned to hunting. You can sell the meat, the skins. Who would buy meat from the cannibal girl? Maybe as a sick dinner party centerpiece but no one would buy the meat just to eat. Freddie said we’d make a lot of money. I need money for when I get out of here. I don’t know who pays Dr. Bloom.”

“No one is paying Dr. Bloom, she’s just doing this to help you. She wants to help you.”

“So I’m her charity case?” she said sadly.

“She doesn’t view it that way,” said Hannibal. “She first viewed you as a favor for friends: we asked her to help you. And now she views you as a friend in your own right. When you’re over the trauma, when you think of it as something that happened, a terrible period in your life — instead of a hell you’re living in — you’ll be just a friend and not a patient. In a few years you’ll be drinking a beer and playing with Will’s dogs with her, barefoot in the garden. While all this is going on she’s keeping your relationship professional. There are things you tell a doctor you don’t tell friends and she doesn’t want to muddy your bond.”

She thought about it and then looked around, “Who foots the bill for this place?”

“The FBI,” Will answered. “I shot your father. The damage was done while I was on their payroll. They take responsibility for your care until you’re eighteen.”

“I’m going to be eighteen in a couple of months.”

“And if you still need to be here Hannibal and I will take care of it. When you leave here you will always have a home with us. That’s not ever going to change. If you don’t want to write the book you don’t have to. We’ll help you figure out your next move. I’m sorry for what happened, for your mother and father, but you’re not alone.”

She smiled at Will. “Thank you. I think I want to write the book. I want people to stop asking questions, I want to be able to point to the book and say, ‘Everything I have to say about any of it is in there.’ Freddie wanted me to write about the girls my father killed. But I don’t want to tell their stories. She was pushy about it.”

Thinking about it Will said, “I have a friend, I haven’t spoken to him in years. He’s a crime journalist. I knew him when I was a cop down in New Orleans. He isn’t like Freddie was. He isn’t writing salacious, gory details just to get readers. He write to keep the police honest. He doesn’t sneak around like her. He gets in cops face and forces them to answer questions the public has the right to know. He helps people who survived write their stories. From what I understand he’s really helpful to them, very kind and soft-spoken. He doesn’t force them to write about anything they don’t want to write about. You might like him. I could set up a meeting, see if you like him. There are a lot of people who do this professionally. He might be a good first step, just meeting someone else who does this and considering what else is out there.”

“Really?” she asked looking at him.

He nodded, “I’m sure I can talk him onto a plane. Would you like me to do that?”

“Yes, and I’d rather you did it now, just so that I know before you leave if there’s a plan.”

Will nodded and pulled out his phone as Hannibal handed them both plates of cake. Will took a bite and said, “Hannibal, that’s delicious.”

Hannibal smiled, “Well, I felt like celebrating quite a lot when I was baking.” Abigail was looking at her plate and Hannibal winked at him. Will looked away, worried that the pleasure on his face might betray him to Abigail. He wasn’t sure whether or not Hannibal wanted Abigail to know. He stared at the phone, trying to remember the department’s number. He was still trying to remember the last two digits when Hannibal said, “Abigail, would it change where you wanted to live if I told you that Will and I are together?”

Will looked up, surprised that Hannibal would say it. Abigail nodded, “Yes… I don’t really like being alone in a house at night. I didn’t even before everything. So where do you guys sleep?”

“I have seven dogs,” said Will with a smile. He felt lighter without the secret. There were too many secrets between them for this one. And he liked that Hannibal wanted her to know. “They need to be let out and fed so we sleep at my house.”

“And do you have a spare room?”

“Well, I won’t once we paint it in whatever colors you want,” he said.

“Thank you.”

He nodded and the last two numbers popped into his head. He dialed it quickly and said, “I’m calling my old precinct. They’ll have JT’s number.”

“JT?” Abigail repeated.

“Jeffery Thomas Lydeck, but it’s the south so he’s JT.”

A woman pick up saying, “Nuorleans Police, Crime Lab and Evidence Division. How can I help you?”

“Hi, my name’s Will Graham. I used to work there and-”

“Will, hon, it’s Charlene.”

Charlene was an overweight woman pushing sixty who wanted to play mother to everyone in the department. She didn’t just bake, she wanted people to confide in her; she wanted people to seek her out for comfort. Will had found it grating but never said so aloud. He found the idea of a “work mom,” as she referred to herself, offensive. He didn’t have a mother and he certainly didn’t need an ersatz one. “Hey, Charlene, it’s nice to hear your voice.” To his own ears he could hear the shift in his voice, the accent slipping into his words.

“You too, hon. How are you? How’s your daddy?”

“I’m good, Daddy’s good. He’s comin’ up to visit real soon. How are you?” He went silent and listened to her prattle for a little while about herself as he ate his cake. Southern manners meant he couldn’t interrupt to point out that he hadn’t called to hear a recap of the years since he’d last seen her.

Eventually she said, “Well, what did you need, hon?”

“JT Lydeck’s number. I needa talk to him ‘bout a friend.”

“Well, sure, hon. I’m sure I’ve got it.” He heard her typing and then she said, “Yeah, got it.” She read it off and he repeated it to Hannibal who typed it into his phone.

Will said, “It was real nice talking to you, Charlene. You have a nice day, now.” He hung up before she could say anything else.

“That was abrupt,” said Abigail.

“She’ll forgive it,” Will shrugged. “Never liked her but she’s always liked me.”

Abigail laughed at that. “Do you know your voice totally changed when you were on the phone with her?”

“Yeah, I’ve always had that problem.” Hannibal held out his phone where the number was written on the screen. Will dialed it into his phone and saved it. JT was a good number to have. He took a deep breath and said, “I haven’t seen JT is a long time.”

“How long?” Abigail asked.

“Before I moved north.” He shrugged, “He was always nice. Soft-spoken.”

When he was in the hospital JT had come to visit him, brought him a notebook and said, “You should write down what you’re feeling. Publish it, throw it away, put it in a closet. Just write it down, get it out. It’s toxic inside.” Will had gone on to write his monographs.

He took another deep breath and then hit send. The man picked up saying, “Yeah, JT Lydeck.”

“JT, it’s Will Graham.”

“Will, how are you?”

“I’m good, how are you?”

“I’m good. Full disclosure, someone sent me a link to that rag of a website that calls itself a crime journalism site. Y’sure yer good?”

Will huffed a laugh, “I’m a big boy, JT, it pissed me off didn’ hurt my feelings.”

“Good. It’s a real rag. Poorly researched, poorly informed and poorly written. So, why are you calling? Doubt it’s to play catch up.”

“Off the record?”

“Sure.”

“Mean it, JT.”

“Okay,” JT said, “off the record.”

“Freddie Lounds is dead, murdered by another rag writer. It’ll be on the news at some point I reckon, but I’m not sure when and you can’t be breakin’ it.”

“Okay,” said JT. “Never met the woman but I can’t really say I’m sorry.”

“No,” agreed Will, “problem is, friend of mine was supposed to be writin’ a book with her and now she’s at a loose end.”’

“Will, that friend Abigail Hobbs?”

“Yeah,” said Will. “Freddie was pushin’ her on a lot of subjects and I remembered you saying you never push survivors; you just help them get where they’re goin’. I was wondering if

you'd come up here and talk to her about what a ghost should do. Maybe write the book with her, maybe just point her in the right way."

"How's she doin', Will? She still in the hospital? Can't imagine she's okay."

"No," agreed Will. "But she's doing well. Right now we're sitting, in the sunshine in the nice garden at the hospital, eatin' cake. My boyfriend is an amazing cook." Hannibal raised an eyebrow, "He dudn't like the term boyfriend. He prefers partner, but that sounds a bit too business-like for me. What are we partners in?"

JT was clearly smiling as he said, "I'll take the meeting. Let me look into flights and hotels, I'm gonna expense it and tell the paper that if anything comes of it they'll get a mention in the half a paragraph I'll give myself on the back cover. I need your address and her address so I can figure out where to stay." Will gave him the information and JT said, "I found myself a flight."

When he gave Will the information he laughed, "My daddy's gonna be on that flight."

"Maybe I'll sit next to him."

"You expense business class seats?"

"Oh, no, I won't be sitting next to him. You're daddy flies business for a two and a half hour flight?"

"He's older, he needs leg room and a comfortable seat. I'll see you at the airport." They made fast goodbyes and Will hung up. "He'll be here on Monday."

"Your dad is coming?" asked Abigail.

"Yeah, he really wants to meet you but I wasn't sure how you would feel about that." He felt his tongue shift, his jaw move, accent slipping away as fast as it had come.

"That really depends," she said, studying her cake instead of him. "Does he kill and eat men who look like you because you moved away from home?"

"No."

"Does he kill anyone?"

"No."

"Is he nice?" she asked looking up with a smile.

"Yes," said Hannibal, "I've spoken to him several times and I'll vouch for him."

"Then I'd like to meet him." She took another bite of her cake and said, "Will, you shouldn't feel guilty for having a nice dad. You don't need to protect me from the fact that you have a dad and I don't. Mine killed girls; he killed my mother; he tried to kill me. You had to shoot him, Will. Just because you shot my dad doesn't mean you shouldn't have one."

Will nodded and said, “Okay.” He took a bite of his cake. “I’ll talk to Alana, we’ll have dinner at my place and you can meet JT and my dad.”

She nodded, “I’d like that.”

They ate their cake and chatted about her therapy. After a couple of hours a doctor came and told Abigail it was time for afternoon group therapy. Will and Hannibal packed up the picnic. And Hannibal said, “We’ll call tomorrow, when we have Dr. Bloom’s permission for dinner.”

She smiled at them both as she left for her meeting. Hannibal smiled at Will and said, “My colleague who should have the opera box for tonight is on vacation. Would you like to finish Aida and go to that café I suggested?”

“I would like that,” Will agreed. “My suit’s at home.”

“We need to let the dogs out too.” The drive home was quiet. It was pleasantly mundane: they put the cake in the fridge, took the dogs for a shorter walk and washed their faces next to each other. Hannibal smiled at him and said, “I think I can skip the tux as I have a plaster on my face.”

Will laughed, “We need to go to your house for any suit so you can decide on the way.” Will put on his suit while Hannibal called Alana. Will heard him speaking in soft words in the kitchen. He knew that Hannibal would win her over. He fixed his hair and went into the kitchen where Hannibal was just hanging up. “All sorted?”

Hannibal nodded, “Yes, she was slightly reluctant but I pointed out that Abigail will be eighteen soon and if Alana keeps her sequestered she’ll leave whether or not she’s ready.”

“Yeah,” Will said and asked, “are you driving or am I?”

“I’ll drive. The valets know my car.” Will nodded and straightened his tie. In the kitchen he put the dogs’ food out and said, “Let’s go.” They listened to Hannibal’s music in the car and Will said, “You’re going to dislike the music in my house for the next two weeks.”

“Oh?”

“Zydeco, all day for two weeks. We sing along, mostly in French. I’ll enjoy but I doubt you will.”

Hannibal laughed, “Well, I did want to give you some space to be with your father.”

“Are you going to disappear on me for two weeks?”

“Would you like me to? It’s one thing to know your son dates men, it’s quite another to have a man your son is dating in the house.”

“You think my father is a fair-weather liberal? Okay with his gay son as long as he never sees me kiss a man? You think when I lived with him no one ever spent the night?”

“So he won’t be biting his lip to keep his thoughts to himself?”

“If only one of your kids has a conscience and doesn’t actively try to screw other people as a way of life I think you don’t care who he thinks is hot. My dad has never once made a disparaging comment about my preferences. He’s made a few mean observations about different boyfriends over the years but never about my inclinations. You shouldn’t feel uncomfortable around him.”

“Good,” responded Hannibal, “I like your house.”

Will smiled, “Me too.”

“I do think, however, that you should seriously consider moving upstairs.”

Will laughed, feeling genuinely good, “You think the view is that much better?”

“No, if Abigail moves in with you. The downstairs bedroom has an adjoining bathroom and I think she’d like that she can go out early in the morning for a run without making any noise on the stairs. You go to bed before her, meaning you wouldn’t be disturbed by her movements if you were upstairs and she wouldn’t have to worry about making noise. And, you need space that’s purely yours. I know you care for her but it would mean having a housemate. Upstairs there’s that room little room next to the bedroom that you could try into a study. It’s empty; make it an office. If you became overwhelmed you could claim you need to do work and excuse yourself. You bought your house so you would have space that was just yours. Make the upstairs your space. The only drawback will be when your father visits. No matter which bedroom you’re in you’re still going to be a bedroom short when he comes.”

Will nodded but said, “I’m seriously considering building him a house.” Hannibal pulled up to the house and Will said, “You’re right. I’ll move upstairs. It does have a nice view.”

As Hannibal unlocked the door, it struck Will as odd that no light were on inside. Will had never gotten to the house at the same time as the man. It was another strange intimacy that he found himself enjoying. Inside Hannibal said, “Would you like a glass of wine?”

“No, thank you.” Will’s phone rang and he said, “You go put on a tux and I’ll answer this.”

“You’ve decided I’m wearing a tux?” Hannibal gave him one of his tiny smiles.

“You do look good in a tux,” Will shrugged, he took out his phone out of his pocket. “It’s my dad.” Hannibal went toward the stairs as Will answered, “Hey, Daddy, what’s up?”

“Nothing, I just wanted to make sure everything was sorted out for Monday. You weren’t home.”

“Hannibal and I are at his house. We’re heading over to the opera, and he’s changing. The plan is still on for Monday but it’s changed: we’re having a dinner party the night you come.”

“Hannibal is throwing one of his fancy shindigs?”

Will chuckled as he went to the kitchen and perched on a stool. “No, nothing like that. You, me, Hannibal, Alana, Abigail and JT Lydeck. It’ll be the most people I’ve ever had in my house at once.”

“What’s JT coming up for? I always liked him but I didn’t think you were close enough to merit a visit.” Will told him about Freddie and the mess and Abigail’s book. “JT’s a nice guy,” said his dad, “if anyone is suited for a job it would be him.”

“I agree I think that-” He stopped talking as Hannibal entered the kitchen.

“Will, honey, you still there?”

“Sorry, Daddy. Hannibal is wearing a tux and he makes a distracting picture.”

“Mouth-wateringly attractive?” guessed his dad.

“You really have no idea,” Will chuckled. The bandage on his forehead did clash with the tuxedo but he still looked amazing.

His dad laughed, “I’ll let you go. Love you.”

“Love you too, Daddy.” He hung up and said, “You know how to wear a tux.”

Hannibal smiled, “Are you ready?”

“Yes,” Will stood up and said, “let’s see how the story ends.” Hannibal held out his hand and Will took it, happily.

End Notes

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